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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6187
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 4364
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 0489
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3251
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PRIORITY 0389
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 3451
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4571
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C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 000565

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2017
TAGS: PREL PTBS MO FR AL
SUBJECT: MFA ON SAHARA: SEEKING ANOTHER WASHINGTON MEETING

Classified By: Charge Wayne J. Bush for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(C) Summary and action request: MFA sources are upbeat on the results of the Western Sahara roadshow, but recognize there is much to be done. They are pressing for a high-level Washington meeting the week of April 2, and also seeking a follow-up with UNSYG Ban. It is unlikely the Moroccans will have much more of substance for a return meeting, but are likely to use it to push for a 12 month MINURSO rollover and seek U.S. commitment to support its diplomatic efforts to see its autonomy ideas. They want a long rollover to provide time to negotiate and to win hearts and minds on the ground (and perhaps to get past September elections here). While they hope the delegation could meet Secretary Rice, they would likely not insist on that level. Embassy would appreciate being instructed to convey Washington's answer on the proposed consultation to the GOM. End summary and action request.

2.(C) DCM met March 27 with Youssef Amrani, Director-General for Bilateral Affairs (the #4 in the Ministry). Amrani was upbeat, having just returned from a Latin American tour with Minister Benaissa and CORCAS head Kalihenna Ould er Rachid which included stops in Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Colombia, and Mexico. Amrani underlined that they did not go to Venezuela. The purpose of the trip was to build support for Morocco's approach on autonomy for Sahara. He asserted that Latin interlocutors reacted positively to the plan, but stressed that the solution must be negotiated. Amrani said Morocco was feeling confident -- the GOM is no longer on the defensive over Sahara. He was pleased that Morocco is willing to depart from what he termed its "inherited Bonapartist" (i.e. highly centralized) structures in favor of decentralization and autonomy. He emphasized that Morocco is open to dialogue with the POLISARIO.

3.(C) Polcouns followed up the same day with International Organizations Chief (A/S equiv.) Nasser Bourita, who has been the key working level contact for (and likely architect of) the diplomatic push. He said he had been to Paris to meet with the GOF for further discussions, indicating that the GOM is consulting first with friends, principally the USG and France and secondarily with Spain, while keeping the UN and other P5 members informed. It wanted to complete visits to all UNSC members before presenting the plan. With the four principals having met the Belgians and gone to Rome that very day, a few more stops remain, including African members.

4.(C) Bourita urged that Washington accept the GOM proposal to send a delegation the week of April 2. The GOM is also seeking to see UNSYG Ban Ki Moon and Personal Envoy Van Walsum the same week, but planned to present its papers in final to the UN only April 10. He understood that the Secretary might not be available, but indicated the

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delegation would be happy instead to meet again with U/S Burns. Moroccan goals for a USG meeting were:

--to present additional details about the autonomy plan and answers to USG questions, and to convey that Morocco is willing to be as flexible as possible in negotiations.

--to discuss what should be published about the plan. Morocco does not intend to provide all the details to the UNSC that it had shared with the USG.

--to discuss follow on strategy, particularly GOM interest in obtaining a longer-term, preferably 12-month rollover.

5.(C) Overall Moroccan strategy was now focused on negotiations. They would seek agreement with the POLISARIO and Algeria. That agreement could be put to an up or down referendum in the territory, which if positive, could be construed as self-determination. No option of independence need explicitly be presented, he said, contending that self determination had in other UN decolonization cases been such a process. Bourita said that if the POLISARIO did not want to negotiate, Morocco could find some subset with would.

6.(C) Bourita said a 12-month rollover was important, although he responded in the negative to Polcouns query whether this was linked to the Government's desire to concentrate on the upcoming September elections. This longer period was instead necessary to give Morocco more time -- to negotiate with the other parties and for Van Walsum and others to engage, to come up with more ideas on some of the existing issues, to intensify its hearts and minds confidence building efforts in the territory, and also so that this would not come to the UNSC during the throes of the General Assembly.

7.(C) COMMENT: European diplomats reported that MFA Minister-Delegate Fassi Fihri briefed the EU COMs April 23 stressing Morocco's interest in negotiations and that it would be very flexible in those negotiations. Fassi Fihri, asked about Kalihenna's comment to the press that if negotiations did not proceed that the GOM would implement autonomy anyway, refuted the CORCAS head, saying that Morocco would, however proceed with a strong version of its nation-wide program of decentralization. A French diplomat, appreciating Washington's close coordination with Paris, reported that Egyptian President Mubarak had told the French he was prepared to host talks between morocco and Algeria on the Sahara and regional issues. The Europeans remain very concerned about the Russian position in the UNSC, given Russia's apparent interest in driving a wedge between Europe and Algeria. Polcouns pointed out that the Moroccan invitation to the GOR to tender for a nuclear power plant may have partly been intended to blunt the traditional Russian tilt toward Algiers. End Comment.

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